

August 28, 2017

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM AS A SOLUTION TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Natural Resource (/full-blog/category/Natural+Resource)

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Two years ago, the deeply conservative state of Kansas repealed a law requiring twenty percent of the state's electric power to come from renewable sources by 2020, seemingly delivering a blow to the state's environmentalists.^[i] But the effect was largely meaningless. Kansas zipped past that twenty percent goal in 2014 and actually produced more than thirty percent of its energy from wind by 2016.^[ii] This underscores the reality that some of the fastest growth in renewable energy is occurring in states led by Republican governors and legislators (read: states carried by President Trump). In fact, Kansas may be the first state to reach fifty percent wind generation, if its northern neighbor, Iowa, does not get there first.^[iii]

Clearly, renewable energy is no longer exclusively a blue-state phenomenon promoted by liberal environmentalists. The five states producing the highest percentage of their energy from wind—Kansas, Iowa, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and North Dakota—are all deeply red states.^[iv] Another reliably red state, Texas, produces the most wind power of any state in absolute terms. 69 percent of the wind energy generated in the country flows in states carried by President Trump.^[v] Red-state investments in renewable energy are not limited to the expansion of wind turbines; rather, solar panels are being installed in red and purple places throughout the country. Texas, Arizona, and North Carolina all rank among the top ten in solar capacity; Florida and Utah are expected to join them by 2021.^[vi]

This raises an important question. At a time when Washington has walked away from the Paris Agreement and no longer cares about emissions standards, could federalism—allowing each state to implement its own clean energy plan, for its own reasons—be the way the U.S. attacks the climate crisis? Whatever their motives, even if they believe that climate change is a hoax promoted by China, the surge in renewable energy among red states does help lower emissions, which means their interests are tacitly aligned with blue states.



Over a decade ago, clean energy proponents and climate change activists, frustrated by federal fumbling, encouraged state governments to adopt binding targets for renewable energy.[vii] Most states did so, setting targets to be met by 2020 or 2025, as climate change was a less partisan issue then. More recently, conservative advocacy organizations have tried to get such laws repealed, but have largely failed. Kansas, where Koch Industries is headquartered, was a rare exception.[viii] However, the state has clearly encouraged the production of many wind farms and its' Republican governor plans to continue doing so. "We export lots of things, and in our future, I want us to export a lot of wind power," Governor Brownback said in a speech.[ix]

The Governor's full-throated endorsement of increasing wind energy capacity, for the purposes of exportation, is a quintessential example of how federalism could be the way in which the U.S. combats the climate crisis. Many other similarly situated Western and Midwestern states are considering how to more closely connect their electricity markets; such arrangements could permit states such as California, Washington, and Oregon to purchase electricity generated in red states such as Texas.[x] Wyoming, the largest coal-producing state which has not gone blue since "All the way with LBJ," could be a major beneficiary if these plans come to fruition.[xi] The state is currently reviewing proposals for a wind farm that would be one of the largest in the world and would consequently lead to Wyoming being a net exporter of renewable energy.[xii] Blue states that are increasing their renewable energy efforts, to compensate for the inaction of the Trump administration, stand to benefit greatly from such an expansion in production. In fact, Governors from both Wyoming and California are already discussing a potential energy partnership.[xiii]

So maybe the best solution to the climate crisis is to simply not talk about the climate crisis. Democrats and Republicans alike get bogged down in ideological dogma that perpetually paralyzes progress on the matter. However, making money and providing jobs has a way of transcending partisan politics. The declining costs of energy from renewable sources will continue to provide opportunities for blue- and red-state cooperation. For these reasons, so long as no one mentions science, the economics of renewable energy will continue to improve at the state level and serve as a primary way the U.S. attacks the climate crisis.

[i] Donald Bryson and Jeff Glendening, *States Are Unplugging Their Renewable-Energy Mandates*, Wall St. J. (July 10, 2015), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/states-are-unplugging-their-renewable-energy-mandates-1436568792>.

[ii] Justin Gillis and Nadja Popovich, *In Trump Country, Renewable Energy Is Thriving*, N.Y. Times (June 6, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/06/climate/renewable-energy-push-is-strongest-in-the-reddest-states.html>.

[iii] *Id.*

[iv] *Id.*

[v] *Id.*

[vi] Ronald Brownstein, *The Winds Are Changing for Renewable Energy*, The Atlantic (July 7, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/are-the-winds-changing-for-renewable-energy/490250/>.

[vii] Gillis, *supra* note ii.

[viii] *Id.*

[ix] *Id.*

[x] *Id.*

[xi] Robert Hopwood, *In Wyoming Wind, a Conservative Billionaire Sees California's Future*, Desert Sun (February 1, 2017), <http://www.desertsun.com/story/tech/science/energy/2017/02/01/wyoming-wind-philipanschut/95452488/>.

[xii] *Id.*

[xiii] Gillis, *supra* note ii.

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